

Westford Executive Summary

The Town of Westford, Town and School Safety Task Force procured the services of Guidepost Solutions LLC to conduct a town-wide and public-school district facilities assessment. The purpose of the assessments focused on identifying existing physical security conditions, and implementation of recommended operational policies and procedures. The intent of the assessment findings was to provide the Town and School Safety Task Force with a baseline of current conditions and identification of issues requiring immediate action.

The procurement of Guidepost to conduct the security and safety-focused assessments is an important starting point in the Town and School Safety Task Force mission to update existing facilities safety and security postures across both town buildings and school campuses. The Town of Westford has adopted a proactive position in addressing safety and security concerns raised by the local community and plan to address Guidepost's findings and implement recommendations in a phased manner as associated funding streams become available.

The major findings of the Guidepost report identify two specific areas that clearly indicated enhancement measures that would greatly improve and strengthen the safety and security environment that students, teachers and staff operate within. These are communication and visitor access control/visitor management. The Guidepost report identified unequivocally that the issue of fundamental importance is the provision of communication equipment at school locations that currently do not have telephones located within the classrooms. Abbot Elementary and Norman E. Day School do not have the ability for emergency phone calls to be made from any of their learning spaces. Both locations are equipped with alternate methods of communication including two-way intercoms that allow communication from a classroom to a reception office, however the existing methods of communication are not always reliable. Reliance upon the reception offices to be staffed at all times to ensure that any communication made from a classroom is an unreasonable expectation. Provision of a voice over internet protocol (VoIP) telephone system is a cost-effective solution to augment communications and provide communication efficiencies and reliability for all teachers as experienced by all other school locations.

Guidepost identified that visitor access control/visitor management is deployed inconsistently, lacks thorough identification checks of visitors, provides different visitor experiences and lack of process for clearly identifying visitors when on school campuses. Guidepost clearly identified that there is no 'enterprise' level system in place that allows schools to inter-communicate between locations as a district if a person with issues has been denied entry at one school, there is no immediate notification to inform other schools of the person(s) denied access. Guidepost identified Abbot Elementary as a high-risk priority facility that does not currently have a vestibule main point of entry that is found at all other school locations. Risk associated with the lack of a vestibule is evident, the reception lobby can easily be breached by 'piggybacking' entry into the school when the main entry door is 'buzzed' by the reception desk. Reception staff do not have the capability to directly view the entry exterior from within the reception office. Furthermore, once entry is gained to the lobby area there is no barrier restricting access to the rest of the school. Strong entry point controls and policy and procedures are important to maintain security posture at schools, the tragic event of the April 2017, North Park Elementary School shooting

which resulted because an estranged husband was allowed free access through the administration area based on familiarization with staff. This resulted in the husband's teacher wife being tragically shot and killed by the husband.

The vestibule approach provides the reception administration staff with the ability to communicate using technology (video intercoms) and also observe the surrounding entry area prior to providing access to a visitor. This capability is enjoyed by all other WPS schools except Abbot. The value of the vestibule is it provides an additional layer of visibility and control to reception than is currently present. A storefront glass based inner wall provides clear visibility and is a consistent deployment across WPS locations. The existing operation can be compromised because there is limited visibility of the exterior area available other than via the video intercom, situational awareness is zero. Adoption of a vestibule and an enterprise level visitor management system across the district would provide invaluable enhancement of existing visitor controls. Identification checks, and issuance of visitor identity badges can all take place at the reception/administration offices as is typically the case at district schools. Guidepost propose the adoption of policy that visitors display a form of identification via the video intercoms for reception review prior to being buzzed in to the entry lobbies at every visit. Provision of credentials via an enterprise visitor management system supports consistency of visitor badge issuance and once a visitors information is input into the database a simple check of identification enhances the sign-in process and is more efficient and thorough than existing paper-based systems.

The Town and School Safety Task Force envision adopting Guidepost recommendations in a timely and phased approach as funding streams become available. The Town and School Safety Task Force anticipate applying immediate available funds to the provision of communication equipment, enhanced main-point-of-entry and visitor management controls at all locations identified requiring imminent attention.